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E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019/09/19
TAGS: ELAB ETRD PHUM KTIP MU
SUBJECT: ROBO JOCKEYS IN OMAN

CLASSIFIED BY: Richard J. Schmierer, Ambassador, Department of State,
Embassy Muscat; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (U) On September 18 Omani dailies in both English and Arabic highlighted an announcement from the Minister of Youth and Sport Affairs that the Sultan has endorsed the use of remote-controlled robot jockeys on racing camels for the 2009/2010 racing season that begins on September 30. Human jockeys will be allowed only if they meet the new minimum age requirement of 18 years. The papers carried lengthy coverage and full-page spreads of camel owners' and races organizers' greetings and gratitude for the Sultan's approval of the use of robots. An editorial on September 19 in state-owned Arabic daily "Oman", (circulation: 38,000) titled, "Preserving Omani National Heritage does not Prevent Modernization" supported the decision citing the protection of jockeys that it provides.

¶2. (C) Comment: Camel jockeys have never been a trafficking issue in Oman, as all "under age" jockeys have been Omani youth engaged with their families in a cultural activity, however, there have been child labor and safety concerns. Oman has been gradually raising the legal age of camel racing to reach 18 this year. The prominent, lavishly illustrated, coverage of this topic reflects a full-court press by the government to portray a broad acceptance of this innovation in a highly traditional area of local culture. End Comment.
Schmierer